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ABSTRACT

This social studies curriculum unit for grades 10-12 provides activities designed to focus students on actual case studies of sustainable community initiatives. The first activity guides the students in a discussion about the terms "civil society" and "sustainable community" to understand how the two terms are related. In the second activity two case studies (one urban and one rural) are looked at to see how the ideas discussed in the first activity are applied to real-life situations. Detailed student handouts and activity instructions are provided along with an extensive teacher's guide. (RJC)

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Civil Society and Sustainable Communities Curriculum

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Civil Society and Sustainable Communities Curriculum

Grade Level: 10 - 12

These adapted activities were designed for the YWCA of the U.S. by the Sustainability Education Center of the American Forum. Printed versions of the entire module will be available from the YWCA and The American Forum and will include numerous case studies and activities designed to focus students/participants on the elements of sustainable community initiatives and on how to apply them to their own local communities.

Overview

The following activities have been designed to focus students on actual case studies of sustainable community initiatives. The first activity guides the students in a discussion about the terms "civil society" and "sustainable community" to understand how the two terms are related. In the second activity two case studies (one urban and one rural) are looked at to see how the ideas discussed in the first activity are applied to real-life situations.

Teacher Background

National attention has increasingly focused on the topic of civil society. Many voluntary initiatives which aim to strengthen society and build communities are being created across the United States. These initiatives involve holistic thinking and integrated community actions by citizens. Their agendas all are determined locally.

The renewal of civil society often means that a new paradigm is needed which is both global and local. In many communities today this paradigm has been found in the idea of sustainability.

In describing a sustainable community, Steve Viederman, President of the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, New York, NY says, "a healthy, sustainable community begins with a participatory process that creates and pursues a vision of community that respects and makes prudent use of all its assets-natural, human, human-created, social, cultural, scientific, etc. The goal is to ensure, so far as possible, that present generations attain a high degree of economic security and can realize democracy and popular participation in control of their communities, while maintaining the integrity of the ecological systems upon which all life and all production depends. In the process, healthy and sustainable communities will assume responsibility to future generations to provide them with the wherewith-all for their vision, hoping that they have the wisdom and intelligence to use what is provided in an appropriate manner."

WARM-UP: ACTIVITY I

Purpose

In order for students to look at case studies of sustainable community initiatives it is helpful to focus on the terms being used. This warm-up activity is designed to start the students thinking about the types of ideas they associate with "civil society" and "sustainable community." Remember, there are no "correct" answers here.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- define the terms "civil society" and "sustainable communities" and
- describe the relationship between civil society and sustainable community.

Procedure

Time Frame: 45 minutes

This first activity uses a semantic map as the strategy designed to "tap prior knowledge."

1. Draw two circles on the board/easel paper. In the first circle write the term "Civil Society." In the second circle write the term "Sustainable Communities."

2. Ask the students to think silently for two minutes, jotting down any ideas or thoughts that come to mind which could contribute to a definition of each term.

3. The activity is then opened to the group to share their notes and brainstorm with one another in the large group. The teacher records the ideas on the board/easel paper.

CAUTIONARY NOTE #1: If your group is considerably larger than twenty, ask them to assemble in their groups of 3 or 4 which you have pre-assigned to them. Ask each group to assign a recorder, a time keeper and a spokesperson who is willing and best suited for presenting the work of the small group. Then ask the students to share their ideas first in their small groups and record their responses. They can consolidate similar responses, but consensus is not necessary at this point. After they have had a chance to share in their small groups, ask the spokespersons to share the work of their small groups.

4. A map or web of ideas is developed. When all the ideas are recorded the teacher can solicit the participation of the group in sequencing, prioritizing or grouping the ideas so that the large group can come to consensus on their definitions and understanding of the two terms.

CAUTIONARY NOTE #2: As teacher it is very important that this process moves quickly and is fun tor the students. The point here is not to develop the "Be All and End All" definitions. If you feel the group getting bogged down with minutia tell the group that for the purpose of this activity perfection is not necessary. THERE IS NO RIGHT ANSWER HERE!

5. The final step in this activity is to discuss the relationship between the two terms "Civil Society" and "Sustainable Communities." This should come fairly quickly and one main idea that you as teacher can help to illuminate is that: The members of civil society are the actors and sustainable communities, the desired condition.

NOTE: Some students may begin to complain that all this sounds very "utopian," but that they are dealing with "real life." If this happens, it will provide a useful segue to the next activity which involves case studies of "real life" examples of sustainable community initiatives.

ACTIVITY II

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to identity, compare and contrast, and analyze the elements of a sustainable community initiative.

This activity is designed to give students "real life" examples of some sustainable community initiatives around the U.S. The small group work is modeled after a cooperative learning strategy whereby students interact and depend upon themselves and one another in order to complete a task.

Time Frame: Two class periods

Materials

1. One case study (either urban or rural) for each participant. (Make sure that the members of each small group are given the same case study on which to work.)
2. large paper and markers
3. tape
4. one "Criteria for Analysis" handout per participant

Procedure Day I

1. Give the members of each small group a case study and the questions hand-out.

2. Assign a recorder in each group if one has not already been identified. Give the recorder in each group a large piece of paper, a marker and some tape. Ask each recorder to title the page with the name of the community case study with which they are about to work, to note the type of study (urban or rural), and to record the answers to the questions on handout on the paper.

3. Ask each participant to read the case study you have handed out to them.

4. When everyone has indicated that they are finished reading, ask the members of each small group to identify a recorder, a time keeper and a spokesperson.

5. Ask the small groups to discuss what they have read and to refer to the set of questions on the "Criteria for Analysis" handout. Let them know that they should address all the questions on the handout, but are not limited to them if time permits them to ask other questions of the case study.

Procedure Day 2

1. Ask all students to review the notes that the recorder has made on the large paper

and to make sure there is agreement that the notes adequately reflect the previous day's discussion.

2. When agreement has been achieved, ask all the spokespersons to put up their large pieces of paper around the room and to stand by them.

3. When all papers are posted, ask one spokesperson at a time (call on them according to contexts--i.e., all rural contexts one after the other--then all urban contexts) to describe their sustainable community case study verbally.

(Note: If the group is considerably larger than twenty students, just pick one group from each context to make a presentation. Other groups can add their comments when it comes time to look at common elements in terms of strategies and processes that were used by the people in their case studies-- if the ones used in their case studies have not been presented in the large group yet.)

4. When you know that all have had a chance to hear/see the work that is up, go to your board or easel and begin to facilitate a discussion about the similarities and differences between the case studies in each context and between contexts that the students can identify. Ask them for any patterns that they see emerging. Record their comments on the board.

5. Categorize the common elements in terms of strategies, processes and patterns with the students in the large group so that by the end of the activity the group has produced a coherent list of common practices between and among the case studies and their contexts. Example: "The case studies described inclusive participation by a wide range of citizens and groups"; "In every case the people realized their concerns and problems were inextricably linked to the concerns and problems of others--and so were the solutions..."; "many cases involved building consensus among diverse participants and opinions."

6. Make note too of any significant differences that seem to emerge as patterns if they seem to be relevant to the discussion.

Further Discussion

1. Ask the students to identify the members of civil society that were represented across the case study sites. Why were they involved? Ask the question, "Do any/some/all of these groups exist in your community?" Facilitate a discussion about the actors in these cases.

2. Ask the students, "who was not there?" Why?

3. Ask the question, "how are these initiatives similar or different to projects and programs that are being carried out in your community?"

4. Then ask the students to comment on what they think makes these cases examples of sustainable community initiatives as opposed to other community initiatives with which they may be familiar or about which they have heard. Record their comments on another sheet entitled, "Sustainable Community Initiatives."

5. The final question in this activity is, "Can you imagine one of these types of initiatives being successful in your community?"

Urban Case Study: Renewal in Melrose Commons

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"Be part of this committee and help save our community. Make changes for your own future, do not let your children down. Plan for your future and their future."

In August, 1990, a draft of plans for revitalizing a 30 block area in the South Bronx of New York City was issued by the New York Departments of City Planning and Housing, Preservation and Development. On paper, these plans appeared fine - proposing the creation of 2,600 new units of housing, 250,000 square feet of new commercial space, the creation of a centrally located 4 acre park, and a realignment of the street system.

In reality, however, this community home to approximately 6,000 people, primarily of African American and Latino descent, with a median family income of less than $12,000 a year couldn't have been less suited to the proposed plan. The crux of the problem lay in the fact that the people of the community were never consulted in the nine years that the city's municipal departments devised this plan. The people of the neighborhood knew that a plan was being developed and that it would lead to a certain amount of displacement (the Draft Environmental Impact Statement identified 78 homeowners, 400 tenants and 80 businesses with 550 employees that would be displaced). They also feared that large tracts of land would be bulldozed to make room for new housing which most of the current residents would never be able to afford. A comprehensive view of the plans, however, was never shared with neighborhood residents, and people had to rely upon rumors as their only source of information.

Gradually, people in the community began to gather together to discuss the pending developments in their neighborhood. The Bronx Center project, a local community group, held a public meeting in which homeowners, tenants and businesses united in their anger over the lack of consultation on changes that would affect all aspects of their lives. They felt betrayed by the elected officials and the city's agencies. The neighborhood residents decided one crucial thing - they were not going to allow the city to roll over them, and they were going to become an active part of the development in their area.

From this vision came the formation of Nos Quedamos - meaning "we stay" - a committee of the Bronx Center project made up of neighborhood citizens dedicated to organizing and planning for Melrose Commons. When the draft of the city's plan was finally presented to the community, the residents of the South Bronx had numerous objections. The people's concerns included: the affordability of the proposed developments; the in-opportunity for existing businesses to expand; the inclusion of services (health care, senior citizens, youth, libraries) not present in the community; the inappropriateness of the designated open space; the realignment of the street pattern that did not account for the way the streets were actually used; the quality of the proposed construction and the appropriateness of the building materials; and the future of the

community for further expansion of municipal services.

With the initial assistance of the Bronx Center project, Nos Quedamos quickly became a diverse, inclusive group of community residents as well as municipal representatives. At the request of the Bronx Borough President, the community was allotted time to formulate an alternate development plan. Furthermore, the Departments of City Planning and Housing, Preservation and Development agreed to abandon the existing plan and to sit down with the community on a weekly basis to develop a new plan that was truly representative of the people's needs and concerns. The Departments of Transportation and Environmental Protection, the Borough President's Office and the Mayor's Office agreed to attend the weekly meetings. With only six months time that the community was allotted to accomplish the planning work, Nos Quedamos had their work cut out for them.

A combination of working sessions and community meetings allowed residents to express their opinions on the neighborhood planning. "Outsiders" to the neighborhood were also often given walking tours of the area to obtain a better perspective of the issues at play. The Bronx Center community organization assisted greatly with technical and design aspects of the revitalization plan.

The goals that emerged from these participatory working sessions were broad and directly applicable to the unique Melrose Commons neighborhood:

- to provide a framework for the redevelopment of the area that respects the existing community by bringing the community in as a partner in the development of the plan
- to provide services - health, cultural and educational, recreational and commercial opportunities that are currently not available and to reinforce those that currently exist and are desirable
- to support economic development anchored on the existing strengths and successes that community residents, businesses and institutions have achieved
- to become a desirable place to live and conduct business for individuals from outside the community who wish to locate here

A number of key principals also emerged from these working sessions, some of which were: to cause no involuntary displacement of people; to create open space that responds to the community's concerns of program and security; to respect the street patterns and movement systems within the community; to turn Melrose Avenue into a "Main Street" in the community; to permit a mixed income community to develop; to develop a variety of housing options; and to encourage opportunities for residents and businesses to increase their earning potential and expand their economic activities. Essentially, people strove to promote development that would be sustainable, would complement the existing infrastructure and the regional location, and would provide for future growth and evolution. Ultimately, the people wanted to design strategies to buy people into the neighborhood rather than out of it.

Due to this collaborative planning process, Melrose Commons now has a comprehensive mixed-use, mixed-income community plan that will help sustain the neighborhood as it is

implemented, and, once fully in place, will be self-sustaining. The basis of the new development plan values people's "sense of place" in Melrose Commons. As little displacement as possible was the goal of the revitalization project, and in cases where displacement had to occur for the plan to go forward, relocation within the community was paramount. According to this plan, residents get credit for time spent in the neighborhood and their homes are valued resources rather than expendable buildings.

Though the physical and economic foundation of Melrose Commons has been greatly strengthened, the most important effect of the revitalization project has been the restoration of people's sense of community and civic responsibility. Through its work, Nos Quedamos established and has maintained a unique collaboration between institutions of higher education such as Columbia University, Pratt Institute, and Hunter College; city and private sector planners; architects; businesses; and local, national and international nonprofit and non-governmental organizations. This sustained and diverse collaboration has produced an unprecedented amount of information sharing and resource exchange, benefitting all involved.

As the plans for the neighborhood continue to be enacted, the residents of Melrose Commons will ensure that their voices are heard by their community representatives as well as their elected public officials.

Rural Case Study: Investing in the Keweenaw's Future

Civil Society and Sustainable Communities Curriculum

The Keweenaw, the western region of Michigan's Upper Peninsula region, bordering Lake Superior on the north and the state of Wisconsin on the south, is one of the last pristine natural environments in the Midwest. A strong sense of community pervades the region, led by the belief that the quality of the environment is synonymous with the quality of life. The region is unique in the sense that people from all walks of life and all income levels are on relatively equal social footing. Someone who doesn't have a great deal of money can still afford to live on 40 acres of land, though property values are rapidly changing. A working person from Detroit, living on a modest fixed income, can hope to retire here.

The amount of remaining natural assets in the region is surprising considering the fact that Keweenaw's economic history is perhaps one of the best examples of unsustainable development in the United States. Cycles of economic activity have been boom and bust, with resource depletion and profit exportation. The world's richest copper deposit was extensively mined to depletion, leaving towns full of unemployed workers and most of the profits with investors out of the region. One of America's finest hardwood forests was over harvested - an action which has greatly reduced the forest's timber productivity for years into the future. Many believe these days of resource depletion are past, but over harvesting of timber lands is still a common practice today.

Another threat to the Keweenaw, which arose in 1988, was the proposed lowering of the state water quality standards in order to attract the construction of a $1.2 billion bleached kraft pulp and paper mill on an untouched part of Lake Superior. Construction of this mill would have brought clear-cutting of the forests, dioxin, and landfill problems, among many others. This threat inspired a grassroots group of citizens concerned about the future of their region to unite and began to plan the steps they would need to take to travel down a different economic path in the future.

In the summer of 1989, FOLK, Friends of the Land of Keweenaw, was formed by this initial group of concerned citizens to provide an effective forum in which to voice concerns about the environmental soundness of regional plans for economic development. Though promoters of the pulp mill promised hundreds of new jobs in a region with 1013% unemployment, over 2,000 residents signed a petition opposing the mill. These people, firmly committed to conserving the many environmental resources in the Keweenaw, recognized that the much needed economic development in the area could not be incompatible with long-term environmental protection or it would destroy the very reason for living in the Keweenaw. Eventually the proposal was withdrawn, and even Michigan's Governor advocated joining together to oppose development of such polluting industries in the Lake Superior Basin.

In April, 1990, FOLK produced a report which emphasized the need for and ways in which the

Keweenaw could progress towards sustainable development - expanding job opportunities and employment security in small-to-medium sized businesses, improving energy and resource efficiency, and maintaining ecosystem health. FOLK devised a three step process for sustainable development in the area: (I) Stop the needless outflows of money and talent, (2) support existing businesses and local control of business, and (3) encourage responsible enterprise and recruit appropriate new businesses. A number of serious realities contributed to the three-steps designed by FOLK. For example, a common complaint among residents in the Keweenaw was that the region's most promising young people got "exported" and that there was little match-up of skills and business needs.

Suggestions on how to address these goals ranged from in-depth strategies to more simple, immediately-impacting approaches. A "Keweenaw Reunion" business development program, run by local entrepreneurs who had previously left the area for better paying jobs or more development opportunities would encourage locals to return to the area and hire new local graduates to curb the "brain drain." Local businesses who had gone outside of the Keweenaw area for hiring could be surveyed to discover what skills were needed that were not available within the community. Subsequently, training programs to give locals the skills for working with area businesses could be devised.

Other strategies for achieving the first step (to stop the needless outflows of money and talent) were more direct, such as working for "buy local" programs by having local governments give preference to local firms when bidding on contracts, or, if local firms aren't adequately qualified by encouraging them to become viable suppliers. Arrangements such as this would not only cut freight costs, but would further encourage the entrepreneurial creativity that would improve the economic situation.

FOLK also recognized that economic problems have been traditionally tackled by looking for a "100% solution," whereas employing 50 "2% solutions" is an approach that stresses local, participatory, and bottom-up activity. A 1988 survey of new businesses in Michigan's Upper Peninsula demonstrated that the 2% approach has proven extremely successful in the region.

FOLK's release of its report spurned on many discussions among the community members. From these regional discussions it was decided that regional, rather than local, planning would better set the base for broad participation in sustainability initiatives. FOLK produced a proposal to establish a Regional Center for Sustainable Development, with the goal of developing and promoting a regional model for a sustainable relationship between human economic activity and the environment. The Center's goal was to create a definition and plan for regional sustainability in interaction with the community itself.

Thirty representatives of the environmental, business and academic communities in the Keweenaw met on July 13, 1993 to build consensus around the proposed plan. The discussion quickly broadened to include members of over seventy groups and organizations which included businesses, schools, environmental groups, labor organizations, Native American communities, public health officials, government organizations and the general public. These discussions were designed to create a free and interactive exchange of both technical information and values and emotions between "experts" in specific areas and the "general public." In this manner, everyone

has a say in the topic being discussed; and the decisions that are made are truly representative of the people that they will affect and are not merely imposed on the many by a few "experts."

In the regional discussions, the group decided that population, consumption, and technology were essential to address in planning for sustainability. Group members created several project ideas that are now currently being developed, such as working with the Keweenaw National Historical Park in the area of responsible tourism, developing an inn-to-inn network of cross country ski trails, exploring the sustainable harvesting of wood and the development of value-added wood products, working to clean up a local area that is seriously polluted from copper mining in the past, and developing a regional crafts cooperative.

One of the biggest successes of FOLK is that sustainability is now firmly on the agenda of the people of the Keweenaw. People have become educated and active, and the ball has started rolling. Undoubtedly FOLK will continue to strive to make the Keweenaw a viable place to earn an income while enjoying the splendid natural beauty of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Criteria for Analysis

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- What is the situation?
- What was the impetus for starting this initiative?
- What are the challenges they are facing?
- Who is involved and what are the different roles that were played?
- What strategies did they use and what processes did they facilitate to address the challenges?